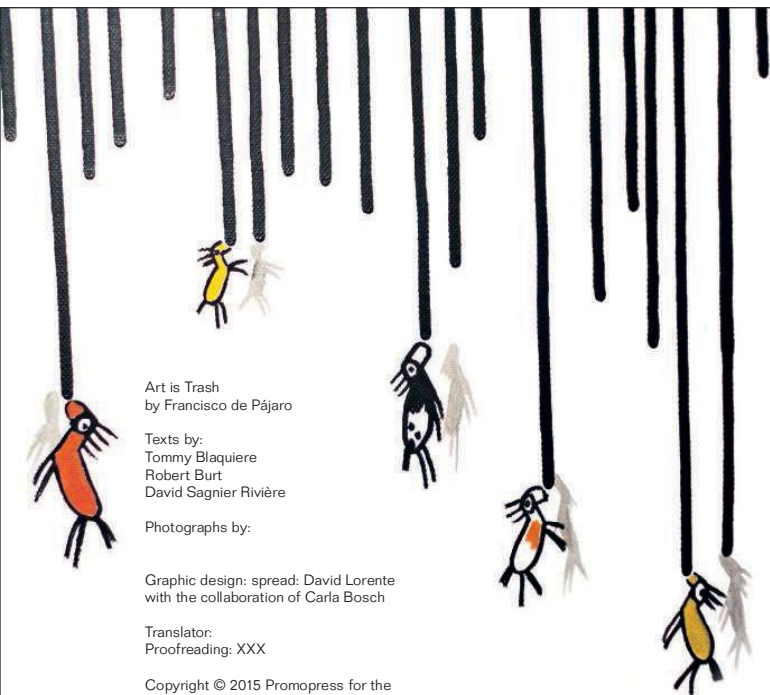




EL ARTEESIAO





Art is Trash
by Francisco de Pájaro

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English language edition for sale in
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PROMOPRESS is a brand of:
Promotora de Prensa Internacional S.A.
Ausiàs Marc, 124
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ISBN: 978-8415967-34-7

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Printed in China

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Foreword

I think Art is Trash (El Arte Es Basura in Spanish)—or Francisco de Pájaro, as he is otherwise known—is the most exciting, original and refreshing artist I have had the pleasure to meet and work with. His use of rubbish—the by-product of our consumerist society—as the canvas for his art makes us look at what we so desperately want to ignore and holds a mirror up to us and our habits. Even just the name Art is Trash and its concept are a powerful work of art in themselves.

I met Francisco for the first time outside the Bar Costa in Sta. Gertrudis, in Ibiza, the morning after one of the annual Urban in Ibiza exhibitions that take place every August. He was introduced to me by Jean-Claude Mesana, the owner of the Holala chain of vintage-clothing shops. Jean-Claude was very enthusiastic about Francisco's work, and managed to show me a few things on his iPhone screen. We agreed to stay in touch since Francisco was planning on heading over to London the following year.

I must admit that as gallerists, Paul "Dizzi" Saunders (my business partner) and I recognized the originality of Art is Trash as street art, but I couldn't at first think how it could lend itself to the gallery environment. Were we going to have to bring sacks of stinking rubbish and old mattresses into the gallery? Was the best option to hold a photo exhibition of Francisco's street work? Either way, we weren't convinced. Nevertheless, Jean-Claude continued to send persistent emails about how he was convinced Francisco was *un grand* ("a great one" in French), and eventually Francisco arrived in London.

We became great friends, not just because Francisco didn't speak a word of English and I speak Spanish, but because he is a very humble, relaxed and fun person who is very easy to get along with. I got to follow him on his street escapades; on these he would paint his face in warpaint and attack all forms of rubbish with his assortment of pens, tape and acrylic paints. I was lucky enough to be introduced to the Art is Trash repertoire of characters and symbols by the man himself.

He also told me how his unique artistic form had come about. Following an unsuccessful art show in a Barcelona gallery, and feeling frustration and rejection at the hands of the conventional art market, Francisco had hurled the slogan *el arte es basura* ("art is trash") onto an abandoned wardrobe sitting in the street. Immediately, someone had started filming what he was doing and a little crowd had formed. Art is Trash was born.

He realized that by painting only on the trash and using tape to create limbs for his subjects he could work without leaving any permanent marks on the streets or buildings. This allows him to act in broad daylight in the face of the authorities without having to worry about fines and handcuffs.

One of the funniest things when following Francisco during his street missions is seeing the different reactions he gets from different people. Although the London public, especially the street-art fans, seemed to welcome his work with open arms (one only has to look at the amount of #artistrash shares on Instagram and Twitter or the amount of different news articles in *The Guardian*, the *Evening Standard* and others to see how much his work is appreciated), the funniest anecdotes are about the people who are opposed to his work. This includes a security guard who rushed outdoors after catching Francisco on CCTV at work on a bunch of rubbish bags. The conversation that ensued is for me what Art is Trash is all about.

"You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Because it's private property."

"Is it?"

I'm paraphrasing, but you get the gist of the comical yet significant nature of the situation.

I'm very happy that this book is coming out, not just for Francisco—who is headed, I think, towards great things—but for you, the reader, too. If you now, after enjoying this book, come across a work of his in the street or in an art gallery you will be able to say: "Hey! I know what this is." And you will in all likelihood be able to get more from it than if you were coming across it for the first time.

Here is a quick little breakdown of the Art is Trash characters and symbols and what they mean to me. *La Batalla (The Battle)*, a work of his on canvas that appears on page 106 of this book, is perhaps the best example to illustrate these ideas.

I categorize them into three broad camps. Firstly, we have "The Indians," who fight for their independence and freedom with their bicycles, children, bows and arrows, tipis and so on. They fight "The Authorities," their enemies: police, soldiers, bankers, conquistadores, politicians, helicopters, dollar signs, bags of euros, gold and so on. And lastly, there is the "No-Man's Land" of the general public: shit, flies, farts, cobwebs, broken bones, eighties sport socks with red and blue bands, and crucially, "The Horse." The horse can be ridden by either a soldier or an Indian and doesn't really control its own destiny. If you look closely enough through this book, you will soon see a horse get sodomized by a human being.

There are elements of Dalí and Picasso in Art is Trash's style, blended with eighties Spanish comics (Mortadelo & Filemón), which I also grew up with and therefore recognized.

In August 2013 we gave Francisco free rein over the gallery to produce his solo exhibition, entitled *Police & Horse*. In an amazingly short space of time he had produced a stunning collection of works on canvas, cardboard and other mediums. He had started by hanging the blank canvases on the walls of the gallery and went on to paint them and everything in between, adding old chairs, portmanteaux and all sorts of other fun stuff to the mix. Even the outside of our Westbank Gallery building ended up covered in various works on cardboard. It was truly interesting to see the adaptation of Art is Trash's street work to the gallery, in other words the duality between "Art is Trash" and "Francisco de Pájaro," two different entities that coexist perfectly.

We recently did a show for another Spanish artist called Pez, who had met Francisco at Base Elements Gallery in Barcelona a few days prior to meeting us. It was Pez who pointed out to me the difference between Art is Trash and the other artists. It's funny that it hadn't been more obvious to me before: Francisco doesn't belong to a "crew" or have other artists with whom he goes out to paint. I've listened to so many conversations between artists meeting each other for the first time and the first thing they do is establish which other artists they've worked with, who they go out to paint with and so on. Francisco is a lone ranger and therefore doesn't have to abide by any of the rules of graffiti or street art. This, in my view, is what makes him so unique.

One night, I angrily headed out into the street with a few markers. I was determined to express myself on anything, and I did it on a metal door. I painted a galloping Indian horse; I meant it to represent my courage and my escape from everything that surrounded me. Unluckily that same night I was caught by three plain-clothed police officers while painting the door. My childish attempts at vandalism ended there.



I am, by nature, violently fragile



The matador is missing



Fatman - Root - Present - Future - Amorphous - Intellect - Vane



After that I carried on going out into the street to paint, full of an intense accumulated rage—and I did, on a rotten door that had been thrown out on the street. From painting on the door I moved on to some cardboard, and from there to a stack of boxes. I realized I was working with the hands, breaking and composing with all the junk I came across. I made the street my personal gallery and creative workshop.

I painted monstrous characters, thinking about the humanity that I detested. I painted them as grotesque, wounded and broken down, pathetic and decadent. I went to great lengths with the ugliness to provoke in the viewer dread and shame about his or her human condition. I wanted to show the real and true misery of everyday life, with acid and disturbing humour.



Madrid



Installation inspired by the events that took place at the Plaza de Catalunya on 15 May 2011.
If we all row together in the same direction we can achieve our dreams.

LDN

2013–14



To the right of this image there was an office building. Its security guard came out to warn me—in a bit of an aggressive way—that I could not paint the rubbish. “Don’t you know that there are cameras everywhere and that they’re filming you?” I knew, because you could clearly see the sign on the fence. I replied that he had to get used to the idea that they are constantly recording and spying on me, him and everyone.

Galleries

Base Elements, Barcelona



Since opening its doors in 2003, Base Elements has functioned as a multifaceted gallery—acting as both a workshop and studio—where space and forum collide. There is no doubt that Barcelona is one of the world's hubs for graffiti and street art. The walls and buildings of the city have become a canvas for both unknown taggers and globally known urban artists. Californian Robert Burt and his wife Monica Riu, a Barcelona native, founded Base Elements Urban Art Gallery in 2003 with hopes of creating a space where such street artists could not only showcase their talents, but also be embraced as true artists. In 2014 David Sagnier, also a Barcelona native, joined Base Elements as a partner.

www.baseelements.net

Westbank Gallery, London



The London Westbank Gallery is situated in the heart of Notting Hill's Westbourne Grove, taking up three floors (ten thousand square feet) of a charismatic old bank building. Home to the world's leading urban and contemporary artists, Westbank is equally dedicated to the championing and promotion of emerging talent.

www.londonwestbank.com

Titles of canvases

Base Elements, Barcelona

Obrero maniatado (Shackled Worker), pp. 102–103
Indio torero (Bullfighting Indian), pp. 104–105
Violencia en la calle (Violence In The Street), p. 106
El pistolero (The Gunman), p. 107
Auto-castigo (Self-Punishment), p. 108
Ataque a galope tendido (Attack At Full Gallop), p. 109
Pájaro, p. 110
Sí, soy grotesco (Yes, I Am Grotesque), p. 111
Dos globos y una flecha (Two Balloons And An Arrow), p. 112
Estampida salvaje (Wild Stampede), p. 113
El cazador (The Hunter), p. 114
Obrero herido (Wounded Worker), p. 115
Poasco permanente (Permanent Disgust), pp. 116–117

Westbank Gallery, London

Autorretrato (Self-Portrait), p. 118
Beauti-full, p. 119
Police and indio ciego (Blind Indian), p. 120
Encadenados (Chained), p. 122
Arresto policial (Police Arrest), p. 123
Tríptico, huída de un mal mayor
(Triptych, Escape From A Greater Evil), pp. 124–125
Cabeza de burro / Mono azul
(Donkey Head / Blue Monkey), pp. 126–127
La batalla (The Battle), pp. 130–131
Democracy internacional, p. 132
Gerónimo, My King, p. 133
La conquista (The Conquest), pp. 134–135